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UA3/3 Today's Image of the Laboratory School

Kelly Thompson

Western Kentucky University

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"TODAY'S IMAGE OF THE LABORATORY SCHOOL"

(An address given by Dr. Kelly Thompson, President
Western Kentucky State College, Bowling Green, Kentucky)

Released by

Harry M. Sparks
Superintendent of Public Instruction

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Kelly Thompson, President of Western Kentucky State College, Bowling Green, Kentucky, has agreed to make available for distribution through Teacher Education Circular # 200, an address he delivered at the annual meeting of the Laboratory School Administrators Association, Conrad Hilton Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, February 18, 1964.

Because of the challenge today of the laboratory school in the teacher education programs across the country, and because of emphasis placed upon student teaching in Dr. Conant's book, The Education of the American Teacher, this address is a very timely one. I am confident that those of you who read it will find it challenging.

Louise Combs, Director
Division of Teacher Education and Certification
State Department of Education
Frankfort, Kentucky

TODAY'S IMAGE OF THE LABORATORY SCHOOL

My good friend, James Carpenter; Dr. Curtis Howd; Dr. Roger Brown; program chairman; ladies and gentlemen:

About eighteen months ago, as a part of a projection in campus planning I attempted to set a time schedule for the creation of a new laboratory school on our campus. After preliminary discussions with those on our campus who were most concerned with the problem, I did considerable research relative to the thinking across this country regarding the future of the campus laboratory school.

As a part of this research, in early January, 1963, eighty letters of inquiry were written to campus laboratory school administrators, directors of teacher education, and officers of selected national associations. Some of you in this audience received letters and were kind enough to reply to them.

Two basic questions were asked:

1. Do you have information which will be helpful in determining the trend of the campus laboratory in your state or neighboring states?
2. Would you please comment on your own personal evaluation of the future of the campus laboratory school?

Sixty-six responses were received:

1. Only six responses were of a nature that could be construed as definitely being in favor of complete abolishment of the campus laboratory school.
2. Approximately ten responses were positive in stating that the campus laboratory school, as it now exists, is essential to a strong teacher-education program.
3. The remaining fifty who responded to the inquiry expressed an attitude best described by a position of "watchfully waiting."

In many cases there was the feeling that most campus laboratory schools were doing little to justify the name. In practically every case emphasis was placed on the need for a re-evaluation of the function and the role of the campus school in the teacher-education program. It was generally agreed that the campus school can no longer justify its existence for student-teaching activities. There appeared to be wide spread doubt that existing facilities should be expanded until the laboratory school and teacher education defined the functions of the laboratory school in the professional sequence of teacher training.

The quick survey revealed that several institutions, and in a few cases entire states, have abandoned the campus laboratory school. Other states have launched upon an expanded program with new facilities for the campus school. Of the fifty who wanted to "wait and see" regarding the future of the laboratory school, practically all advised me to come to Chicago to last year's meeting where they felt we would find the answer.

I have sensed a "question mark" attitude on the part of some colleagues with whom I have discussed our emerging plan to build a new laboratory school, but I was totally unprepared for the lack of conviction which came from the survey.

We came to Chicago last year. President Howd, in his remarks, mentioned that several representatives from our College accompanied Mr. Carpenter to your meeting at that time. This group, made up of the Director of our Training School; the head of our Department of Education; our Dean of Admissions, who is a former director of our laboratory school; and the director of our student teaching program, met with me in a series of conferences prior to their coming. I joined with this group on the evening of the opening day of your convention, and at that time we started a series of discussion sessions which continued until we departed for home at the close of the meeting of the AACTE.

In my room in this Hotel, we explored the problem through several lengthy conferences, some of which were extended beyond midnight. Following are some of the questions which the president directed to this committee in the frank and thorough discussions which we held:

1. Shall the director of the laboratory school be responsible to the department of education, or a college of education, or directly to the college administration?
2. Should the new school be created as a separate entity which might guarantee a smooth, well-functioning, 12-grade school with the parents and the children and the public contented and happy, or should the college plan a department-controlled school where the emphasis is placed upon experimentation and research, opening up new problems in dealing with the patrons of the school?
3. If the laboratory school is directed by a department faculty, what checks and balances should be used to prevent a division among the so-called professional educators and the so-called academicians?
4. What is the correct procedure of experimenting with the teaching of children in a laboratory school?
5. Has anyone devised a magic way to eliminate the experiments which are conceived either to strengthen or to prove an already set opinion, or to produce some more "printed matter" as bits of professional status "cheese" in the rat race known as "What have you published lately?"
6. How does a college project a plan in which there will be balance between the immediate needs of the pupils in the laboratory school and the necessary "guinea pig" explorations which are necessary better to ascertain the needs of the pupils of the future?

7. How does the college arrive at a reasonable conclusion as to the size and scope of the laboratory school?
8. Should the laboratory school deal only with the elementary grades?
9. Should it include junior high?
10. Should it concentrate only on junior high and high school, or should it include all the grades?
11. Should it, if it includes all grades, be structured in size and scope at the very beginning, or start at one point and then, because of semester-to-semester pressures, be allowed to "grow like topsy?"
12. How much money should a president be willing to recommend to his board of regents, or trustees, as being a worthy and reasonable investment for this unit of teacher education?
13. Should the teachers in the laboratory school enjoy exactly the same rights of tenure and rank as other faculty members?
14. Should the teachers in the laboratory school be asked to think in terms of status in comparison with the general faculty members of the college, or with similar teachers during similar work in the public schools which surround them?
15. How much of the financial load should the parents of the pupils in the laboratory school carry?
16. If this amount is fairly heavy, what then happens to the children at the lower end of the economic level?
17. If the financial burden is kept at a minimum in order to have a cross-section of pupils, does the college budget-maker then agree to underwrite all advancing costs?
18. If the tuition or financial help is increased as costs increase, does the college then move toward the concept of the private or preparatory school, catering only to the people in the community with strong financial means?
19. What process do we use to set up a new type of laboratory school program which will become a guiding light in teaching in our geographic area, both for student teachers and for teachers in service?
20. Where does one find a true definition of the functions of the laboratory school in the professional sequence of teacher education--a definition that fits tomorrow rather than yesterday?

There are many other questions similar to these which I asked as I falteringly groped toward the larger answers, but I believe these will illustrate the nature of the search in which I was engaged.

To those of you who have been so long and so intimately associated with the laboratory schools of our country, some of these questions may appear to be elementary; and it might be that you would suggest I go to the laboratory people, to the college faculty, to the national associations, to the prolific writings on the subject which have been accumulated through the years, to the general public itself. If this would be your suggestion, may I say that I have done all of these.

I received from the laboratory school administrators and from other experts in the field a very wholesome philosophy and some very stimulating statements regarding purposes and functions and accomplishments. Let me illustrate during the next few minutes.

1. Involvement in the total teacher education program:

No longer is there any valid reason why the laboratory school should be isolated from the college or from the faculty members who are responsible for the teacher-education program. There was a time when not only the professors in education but academic professors who were responsible for the teachers' academic preparation were strangers to the laboratory school. Today the laboratory school which is discharging its vital role in an integral part from the standpoint of facilities, staff, and program of the total teacher-education program.

2. An instrument for leadership in education:

It was through the experience of the laboratory teachers that we came to recognize that a prospective teacher could not be prepared adequately through a student-teaching program of one or two hours a day.

It was through the leadership in these schools the notion was created that student teaching should be an all-day experience so that the young teacher would get insight into the total day's program of experience for children and young people. One of the dramatic changes in the student-teaching program has been from the one-hour or two-hour program to an all-day program.

Another example of the discharging of the leadership function is in relation to where student teaching is done. At one time the laboratory school was used as a facility for practice teaching. Through the leadership offered in the laboratory school we came to recognize the fact that from one to a dozen student teachers in one classroom with one supervising teacher did not provide experiences factual enough to make a difference in the behavior of a young teacher.

From the laboratory school we learned to divide these groups and to have some of the student teaching done off-campus. Then the idea was expanded, and we were lead to accept the notion that even though the laboratory school could make room for only one or two student teachers per supervising teacher, the student teacher actually needed the off-campus experience in a public- or private-school situation in which he would function as a full-time teacher when he was employed.

3. An instrument for curriculum change:

In laboratory schools which are leading the way, curriculum studies are under way on a continuing basis--studies involving the academic staff members of the college, professors of education, and laboratory school personnel.

4. Facility for research and experimentation:

This perhaps is the most difficult function but an imperative one.

The school should be a center for research and experimentation. The general design for research should be worked out by the faculty, and the nature of the staff, student population, program, and physical facilities should be such as to encourage the broader use of the school or research and experimentation purposes.

5. Center of learning for observations:

The laboratory school is an instrument through which students from the freshman through the graduate level may observe teachers as they translate theories of learning into learning experiences.

Innovations in teaching and learning should be observed by teacher-education students throughout the four-year program.

Among such innovations which are tried out in the laboratory schools are the program of dramatic arts, the use of films, tape recorders, programmed learning, foreign languages in elementary schools, team teaching, and the new curriculum in science, mathematics, and other subjects.

6. A demonstration center:

In the laboratory school there is opportunity for demonstration to young teachers of not only good teaching, but in demonstration of new facets of an over-all education program, such as the demonstration of an effective guidance program, demonstration of a centralized library program, materials center--demonstration of the use of the services of an art consultant, music consultant, and reading specialists. As these facets of a program become integral parts of the public-school program, the laboratory school needs to demonstrate the most effective ways possible of integrating them into the total program of education.

One of the most significant roles of the laboratory school is as a demonstration center where traditions are broken. Traditions must be broken if what we have learned about how children grow and learn is translated into actual learning situations and into our educational programs. Traditionally, every child in the past was assigned the same lesson and held to the same standard regardless of the intelligence God gave him or the level of achievement he had reached.

Under such kinds of situations, children failed by the thousands and eventually became dropouts. The factor which contributes most to dropouts is the failure of schools, teachers, and administrators to put into practice what has been learned in the laboratory schools during the past decade about how children grow, learn, and are motivated.

The public's image of the laboratory school is one of rising expectations of parents in regard to education in general; and with a clear call for quality education, the mood of the time is "CHANGE."

In tune with this mood for change, the public accepts the concept of the laboratory school where changes are made, new theories of learning, new theories of teaching are tried out and changes made.

The image the public has of the laboratory school is on the positive side. The laboratory school enjoys today full confidence of the public. This is evidenced by the great demand by parents to have their children enrolled in the laboratory school; by the support the public gives through the state legislatures for the constructing, staffing, and maintaining of laboratory schools; by lack of a wave of public criticism which other facets of education have experienced.

Elementary schools, secondary schools, and teacher education in general have experienced during the past decade a great wave of criticism, but we do not see in print or hear on radio or see on television any significant criticism of the laboratory schools. The attitude of the public--attitude of faith and confidence--is reflected in a new movement toward the cooperative endeavor of combining a public-school system with a laboratory school, where the local board of education joins with the college board of education or the board or regents in financing, supporting, and operating a joint laboratory school. Again this reflects the desire on the part of the public to have their children involved in an educational program where they have the benefit of innovations in education--where the latest and newest are underway.

The general attitude of the public is reflected in the fact that the public is supporting even larger laboratory schools today than ever before. Where previously across the country there was one class of first graders, second graders, etc., the trend is toward having two classes of each grade.

It is apparent that the present functions of a laboratory school are the very roles which hold the greatest interest for parents and the public--experimentation; research; new curricula in mathematics, foreign languages, and the sciences; team teaching; programmed learning; educational TV; the materials center; guidance; and last but not first in the hearts of parents, individualized and personalized instruction.

It is the concern of the laboratory school for the growth and development of each child in relation to his abilities, interests, and achievements and the fact that all resources of the laboratory school and of the supporting college are used to this end that gains for the laboratory school the moral and financial support of the public.

There are many other statements--all good ones-- which I could use, but the ones which I have used are typical illustrations of philosophy and in some cases, I am sure, actual reality. I must leave it to each of you as to whether they are reality in your school.

As far as I was concerned, I found more of this beautiful picture still in the paint pots rather than on the canvas.

For example, I went to the public, at least in our locality, to find that their image of the laboratory school was not entwined in such beautiful and philosophical appreciation. My experience with the public revealed almost a total lack of knowledge on the part of the patrons regarding the true purposes of the laboratory school. The public liked the laboratory schools immensely. The laboratory schools indeed have an excellent reputation with the public, but only as outstanding schools for their children--very little more.

I also went to pertinent literature which has accumulated through the years, much of it from national leaders in the field. I have enjoyed the study of the subject through speeches, pamphlets, books, and tapes, and it has truly been revealing and educational; but the truth of the matter is that I found very little in this field pinpointing the direction for the challenging future. Most of it seemed to me to be an appraisal looking from now backward and not from now forward.

Where the thinking was toward the future, the language was, in most cases, couched in warnings that "what has been or is now will not fit the changing times which are moving in upon us."

At this point I would like to tell you briefly of a city-college cooperative school which was opened last September at the western end of our campus. The city of Bowling Green needed to build an elementary school to serve the area of the city west of our campus. To make a long story short, our city and our College built a cooperative school with the College paying its appropriate part for the space it designed for use in its program of student teaching.

You will recall that just a few moments ago, I gave to you an appraisal of the function of the laboratory school as an observation center. This appraisal, as I stated, came from people who were interpreting to me the functions of the laboratory school. I shall not attempt to make any direct comparison of the opportunities for observation provided in the cooperative school which we have built with the average laboratory school which I have seen.

You can, however, draw your own comparisons when I tell you that it is possible, if we needed to, to schedule, each semester, nearly 150,000 student-teacher observation hours in the cooperative elementary school through the use of nine especially designed rooms, each with one-way glass. For the purpose of further comparison, may I say that the facilities are so constructed that our faculty members may lecture as they see fit while the observations are taking place.

The College's part of the cost of the creation of this facility was unbelievably small.

In a further effort to analyse the doubts in my own mind, I talked to college faculty members, and the information which I gleaned from them indicated the same type of reservation which I found in the survey to which I referred at the beginning of this talk. It consisted primarily of "wait and see" attitude.

Therefore, I must conclude that today's image of the laboratory school in our country is one which is surrounded by confusion. The confusion is such that, in our case, we have postponed for more than a year any plans for a new building and a new program.

Such a conclusion does not mean that those who are most responsible for the charting of our course in the future are not trying, nor is it, in my opinion, any indictment toward all of the many people who must draw the plans and specifications for teacher education for the future.

It is, however, in my opinion, a challenge to all of us--a challenge in this area of education as truly exists in the total program of higher education--that of looking and searching and defining for the future, rather than enjoying putting together and perusing more studies and surveys which deal only with the past.

At this point, although I am sure that it will sound incongruous, I would like to tell you a conviction which has overtaken me within recent weeks. I have become more and more convinced that we cannot maintain on our campus the highest type of teacher education without having the highest type of laboratory school as an important adjunct to this responsibility. It is my plan, at the moment, to give direction as best I can to the creation of a new physical plant and I shall, in due time, recommend to our board of control that this heavy financial responsibility be undertaken for the years which lie ahead.

Why? In the light of the confusion which I have described and of the lack of a true sense of direction which I have failed to find, it might follow that I should join with so many others and "wait and see." I would like to tell you why.

I have confidence that the questions which I have asked, although unsatisfactorily answered at the moment, will be answered during the changing and challenging period which lies immediately ahead of us.

I have this faith because, first, I believe in our profession, and secondly, I believe that we have the necessary educational statemanship within the ranks of those who must deal with this facet of education's future.

I have confidence that the laboratory-school administrators themselves, many of whom are assembled in this room, through dedication and ability, will be willing to forge the laboratory school into a new instrument for teacher education and will see to it that new concepts and objectives for the laboratory school, in the total program of education are geared to the future, as surely they must be.

I have confidence that the professional educational staffs and other faculty members will, through the same type of statesmanship to which I have referred, eliminate empire building, eliminate the colonization of the laboratory school program by making it subservient to another program, and will eventually eliminate the ridiculous controversy which exists between professional education and general education.

I believe that the questions which I have asked, only a small sampling of which I have brought here, must be answered on each campus by a closer and more empathetic evaluation on the part of the administration of the college, including the president himself.

I feel this way because of the same type of philosophical reasoning which I mentioned earlier and which I applied to the laboratory school directors themselves.

This type of reasoning says to me that nowhere in this country is there a more outstanding group of men and women than those who are charged with the education of our youth. After thirty-five years of close association with those who teach, I know in my heart that this is true, and I have a strong confidence in you who gather here from across the nation and in those who work on our campus with our own tiny segment of American education.

My confidence is that we will exhibit in this effort the type of educational statesmanship which must guide all of our efforts in the future.

Disraeli said, "The more extensive a man's knowledge of what has been done, the greater will be his power of knowing what to do." This we believe to be true. At the same time, however, we believe that we must perpetuate only the part of the past in education which is adaptable to, and which will help build a greater future.

And finally, let me challenge you and myself to a quality of statesmanship which can only come from the hearts of men and women dedicated to the proposition that the custody of the minds of others can never be worked by a slide rule or by unchanging formulas--a quality of statesmanship to be accomplished only through the use of every iota of intelligence available, combined with a burning and perpetual dedication to the task itself.

Because I believe that this type of educational statesmanship will be forthcoming and adequate, I, as one lone college president, have found direction in spite of the confusion. May we pray that all of us will measure up to this responsibility, and that truly it will be our best, as we plan for and undertake the exciting years which lie ahead.